

# Safer Seniors

## ***BE ALERT WHEN OUT AND ABOUT!***

- **G**o with friends or family, not alone.
- Carry your purse close to your body, not dangling by the straps. Put a wallet in an inside coat or front pants pocket.
- Don't carry credit cards or large amounts of cash you don't need.
- Use direct deposit for Social Security and other regular checks.
- Whether you're a passenger or driver, keep car doors locked. Be particularly alert in parking lots and garages. Park near an entrance.
- Sit close to the driver or near the exit while riding the bus, train or subway.
- If someone or something makes you uneasy, trust your instincts and leave.

### ***MAKE YOUR HOME SAFE AND SECURE***

- Install good locks on doors and windows. Use them! Don't hide keys in mailboxes and planters or under doormats. Instead, leave an extra set of keys with a neighbor or friend.
- Ask for photo identification from service or delivery people before letting them in. If you are the least bit worried, call the company to verify.
- Be sure your street address number is large, clear of obstruction and well- lighted so police and other emergency personnel can find your home quickly.
- Consider a home alarm system that provides emergency monitoring for burglary, fire and medical emergencies.

## **WATCH OUT FOR CON ARTISTS**

- Don't fall for anything that sounds too good to be true—a free vacation; sweepstakes prizes; cures for cancer and arthritis; a low-risk, high-yield investment scheme.
- Never give your credit card, phone card, Social Security number or bank account number to anyone over the phone. It's illegal for telemarketers to ask for these numbers to verify a prize or gift.
- Don't let anyone rush you into signing anything—an insurance policy, a sales agreement, a contract. Read it carefully and have someone you trust check it over.
- Beware of individuals claiming to represent companies, consumer organizations or government agencies that offer to recover lost money from fraudulent telemarketers for a fee.
- If you're suspicious, check it out with the police, the Better Business Bureau, or your local consumer protection office. You can also call the National Consumers League Fraud Information Center, at (800)-876-7060.

## **GET INVOLVED IN THE COMMUNITY**

- Report any crime or suspicious activities to law enforcement.
- Join a Neighborhood Watch to help out and look out for each other.
- Work to change conditions that hurt your neighborhood. Volunteer as a citizen patroller, tutor for children, aide in the police or fire department, mentor for teens, or escort for individuals with disabilities.

**Adapted from *Senior Crime Prevention*,  
Los Angeles Police Department**

# Senior Crime Prevention

The population of Virginians age 60 and over will grow from about 15% to 25% by 2025 and the number of Virginians age 85 and older will increase at a rate five times faster than the state's total population.

Many seniors fear becoming victims of crime. The truth is, seniors are victims of crime less often than younger people, but the effect of crime on seniors is often more severe.

Three general rules to promote senior crime prevention are:

- **STAY ALERT!** Be tuned-in to your surroundings; don't be taken by surprise. Be aware and prepared, even in your own neighborhood.
- **STAND TALL!** Walk confidently; don't show fear, don't look like a victim.
- **TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS!** If you feel uncomfortable in a place or situation, leave right away and get help if necessary.

## Secure Your Home

Never open the door to strangers; always insist on proper identification.

If someone comes to your door with an emergency (for example, a traffic accident or an injury), **DON'T LET HIM OR HER IN!** Call 9-1-1 for them!

Use deadbolt locks on all exterior doors. Always keep your doors locked. Have a peephole in the door so you can see a caller without opening it. Don't rely on security chains; a determined assailant can easily break them.

Protect windows and other points of entry with good locks or other security devices (such as a length of wooden doweling placed in a track to prevent a window or sliding glass door from opening).

Mark and record your personal property. When you go out, make your home sound and appear occupied by using an automatic timer to turn on interior lights and a radio. Keep the outside premises well lit at night.

Do not leave your key under the mat or in a flowerpot. Use outdoor lighting, shrubbery and fencing to help secure your home.

Consider electronic surveillance systems, alarm systems and/or a dog to enhance your home security. Consult with a crime prevention

specialist for personalized home security tips.

If you believe you have been victimized, call the police. Con artists count on the reluctance of their victims to acknowledge they have been tricked. Don't delay, report them right away. If you never report the incident, con artists will cheat again and again.

## **Elder Abuse**

By being alert to situations that could lead to abuse of an elderly person, you may be able to prevent a serious injury or save a life. Look for any unusual unexplained bumps, bruises or cuts. Look for unusual changes in behavior. If you don't hear from elderly friends for several days stop by and check on them. Be alert for salesmen at elderly friends' homes. Look to see if elderly friends' homes are unusually unkempt or a friend begins to look malnourished. If elder abuse is suspected, contact Virginia Adult Protective Services at (888) 83-ADULT.

## **Convalescent Home Crimes**

Often convalescent home crimes and related quality of life issues go unreported. These crimes and issues usually go unreported because seniors fear retaliation for reporting crimes by their

caretakers. Seniors may also think that no one cares about them or what happens to them. The following is a list of possible signs of abuse and neglect in a convalescent home:

- **Physical Abuse** - Rough handling or grabbing, hitting or slapping.
- **Neglect** - Untreated medical condition, dehydration, malnutrition, bedsores, rashes, sores, lice, over- or under-medicated.
- **Sexual Assault** - Rape, sodomy or sexual battery.
- **Emotional/Psychological Abuse** - Verbal threats of punishment, constant harassment, threat of withdrawal of services.
- **Financial Abuse** - Theft of personal effects, overcharging for services, fraudulent billing for non-services.

## ***What to Look for in Selecting a Convalescent Home***

- When choosing a home, look at the surroundings. Check inside and outside the home for cleanliness. When walking inside smell the air. It should smell clean and fresh.
- Look at the home's equipment to make sure it is not outdated and is in good working condition. Talk to employees about the condition of the home and their work environment.

For assistance, contact the Virginia Center for Elder Rights (toll-free) at (800)-552-3402.

## Fraud and Con Games

If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Here are some tips to alert you to fraud and telemarketing con games:

- You must act now!
- You've won a free gift or vacation.
- Pay only postage and handling.
- You can't afford to miss this "high profit, no risk" offer.

## In Your Car

- Know where you are going and how to get there.
- Maintain your vehicle in good working order, with ample gasoline.
- Plan your trip and take friends along.
- When possible, travel during daylight hours.
- Don't enter dark parking lots or deserted garages.
- Leave only your ignition key with parking attendant.
- Let someone know where you are going and your planned return time.

- When driving, lock your doors and windows; lockup when you leave.
- If you suspect someone is following you, drive to the nearest public place.
- Never pick up hitchhikers.

## If You Are a Victim of a Crime

- Don't resist.
- Never pursue your attacker.
- Call the police. Dial 9-1-1 in case of an emergency.

### ▪ **REPORT CRIME!**

You may have money returned and prevent further theft from yourself and others!